THE SCHOOL MUSEUM

The museum holds an important place in the scientific life of a school. To be sure, it is of subsidiary importance as compared with a collection of scientific specimens in their natural habitat out of doors, but it has the advantage of being always available, and of presenting material in a concentrated and unified form.

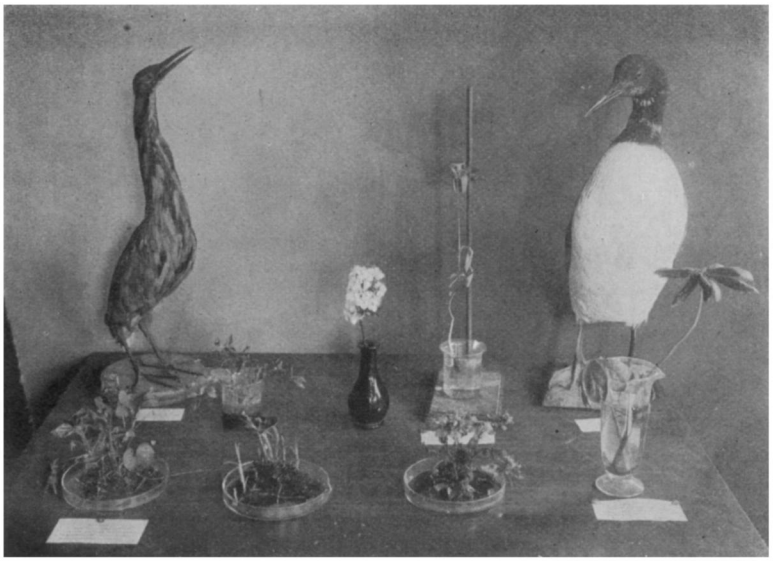
The modern museum is seeking to add the naturalistic flavor by setting forth its contents in habitat groups. By this means the specimen is taken from its isolated position and put down in close relation to its natural neighbors, among which its real significance may be more nearly appreciated. For a school museum, then, the need is to present material in a natural way.

In addition, the museum should be related by personal ties to the life of the school. A striated bowlder collected on an eighth-grade excursion bears a vastly greater significance than one shipped in from a moraine in Iowa. And a vireo's nest collected by Lizette during her summer vacation means far more to her fellow-pupils than the more beautiful nest of a weaver-bird from Africa. Self-activity, then, is of utmost importance in the gathering together of a collection of specimens for a school. In many cases, materials used in the work of the grades are those prepared previously by the children of the school. Examples of this sort of coöperative work are a series of bottled samples showing the different stages in the manufacture of flour, cards with dyed cloth, and samples of the dyes and mordants used, bottled soils with data showing the composition as determined by the children, and pressed and mounted specimens of wild flowers. Too much emphasis cannot be placed upon the value of work of this sort. And its products, though often crude, have a truer place in the school museum than other kinds of specimens.

To be associated closely with the life of a school, the museum must be so placed as to command more than casual observation. Its isolation in an unfrequented room cuts it off from any natural use; and its position in a corridor may go quite to the other extreme, the very intimacy of its presence giving it no more significance than the walls and furniture. Plainly, the ideal location for a museum must

be a compromise between seclusion and conspicuousness, between aloofness and familiarity.

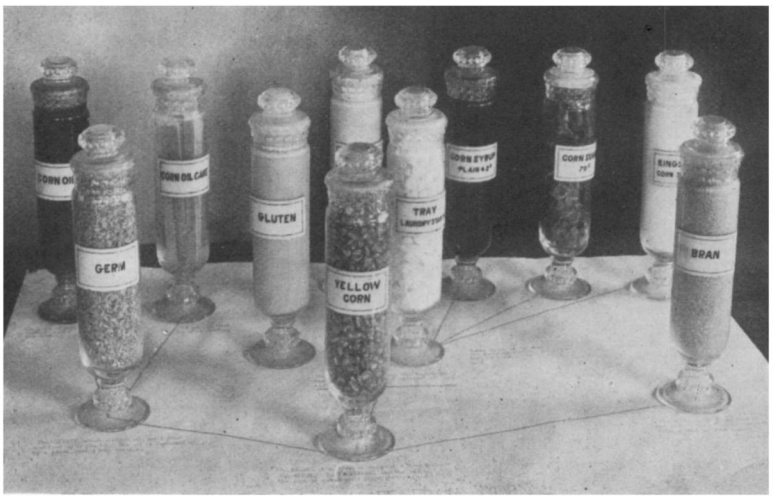
Our museum is moderately well constituted, both on the bases of naturalistic arrangement and of personal association. It is located in the corridor of a second floor, through which a large part of the school passes many times daily. It is as successful a formal exhibit as one may usually find in a school. The question as to how it may



HALL EXHIBIT OF SPRING FLOWERS AND BIRDS

come into a fuller relation with the individual pupil has led to the adoption of the following practice. Each week there is prepared a special exhibit which is placed on a table near the main entrance in the lower hall. The exact position may vary, as may the time of appearance. Thus the factor of position is made more efficiently favorable. The material of the exhibit is selected on the basis of seasonal interest when possible. This selection is particularly fortunate in the case of birds, insects, and plants. The blue jay and downy woodpecker are in close focus for a January exhibit, while the warblers and flycatchers take their places in May; the early buds and blossoms have a real significance in March, which is shared later by the various spring flowers which are available to the Chicago region. These may

be brought in by the children from excursions or from holiday trips. The selection of an exhibit may likewise be based upon its relation to the regular science work of the grades. If the fourth grade is studying volcanoes, their appreciation of the subject may be furthered by the realization that the whole school is looking at igneous rocks in a hall exhibit. The study of ore and ore-deposits in the eighth grade leads naturally to an exhibit of ores, especially since



THE CORN-PRODUCTS EXHIBIT

Victor has brought in a number of specimens of sphalerite which he has secured at a zinc smelter.

Grade science work draws extensively on the materials of a museum for illustrative purposes, and the presentation of similar specimens to the school as a whole should give the subject under discussion a seemingly more cosmopolitan significance. Among the calls for specimens from the museum in the course of a year's work, the following may be mentioned. The first grade has need for the Eskimo and Indian curios, as well as for samples of the common rocks; the second grade uses samples of grains, and birds; the fourth requires specimens of igneous rocks, and textile and food products, to be used in connection with the study of geography; the eighth grade makes constant use of rock specimens; the high-school classes in chemistry and commercial geography take advantage of industrial

exhibits to illustrate the methods of preparation of corn-products, salt, mineral oils, and cotton.

All specimens of the special exhibits are labeled plainly and frequently have in addition a short statement purposing to stimulate interest or to emphasize importance. If by this means the "out of doors" may be brought close to the lives and thoughts of the pupils, if by an association with more or less artificial material the true significance of the natural may be made clear or emphasized, the school museum has gone a long way in fulfilling its purpose.